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BROKEN GEMS AND WHOLE TILES:
A REVIEW ARTICLE

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Control of Japanese Foreign Policy; A Study of Civil-Military Rivalry, 1930-1945. By Yale Candee Maxon. University of California Publications in Political Science. Vol. 5. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles. 1957. pp. viii, 286. Cloth, \$6.00; paper, \$5.00.

The United States and Japan. By Edwin O. Reischauer. Revised Edition. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1957. pp. xxiv, 394. \$5.50

The two books under review here exemplify, each in its own way, the prosperous state that Japanology has attained in this country. Maxon adds his name to the already respectably long list of American students whose grasp of sources is both broad and deep, who have worked directly with Japanese individuals and institutions as well as contemplated them, and who furthermore have a point to make. Maxon's book is a closely documented monograph. The revised edition of Reischauer's book contains some changes and a new section covering postwar trends. Reischauer in this book is not so much the monographist as the practitioner of humane letters, whose grasp of the facts is so sure and comprehensive that he can proceed to consider their meaning without pausing for exhaustive description.

Both men exhibit the historian's bent. Your reviewer is predisposed to a sociological approach. The questions I shall ask of the books refer to the explanatory concepts used by the authors and to how much these concepts explain or leave unexplained.

Maxon's conceptual apparatus is multidimensional. If one dimension rather than another seems most prominent in his discussion of a given period, this on the whole reflects a perception of certain kinds of issues as crucial for the period. I will not attempt to summarize his whole interpretation of the process by which the military in prewar Japan gradually achieved a working monopoly of the power of decision in foreign affairs and of how the power was finally regained by civilian authority. My interest is in identifying some of the explanatory concepts and seeing how and when they are applied.

In his treatment of the period up to 1930, which is handled largely as background for the later period in which he is more interested, Maxon considers for the most part formal institutional factors. There is on the one hand the Meiji Constitution with its formal but not unambiguous definitions of spheres of authority. On the other hand there were the newly formed or reformed structures--the cabinet, the political parties, the Army and Navy and others--whose different and at times conflicting ambitions and maneuvers gradually led to the establishment of precedents by which the actual powers of the various structures were in fact determined.

Maxon's overall evaluation of the outcome of this process is that it produced an inadequate governmental system. The major defects appear to be two. First, the institutional structure involved too much dispersion of authority and

responsibility. Second, the working of the system could have been, but in fact was not, adequately regulated if the Emperor had actively served as coordinator of activities by various parts of the government. In default of such coordination these activities led to conflict and to the gradual surrender of powers by the civilians to the military, especially during the 1930's. Maxon contends, in disagreement with some other students, that this function was well within the constitutional definition of the Imperial prerogatives. He points out that there were precedents in the Meiji period for personal decisions (goseidan) on the part of the Emperor and argues that: "This latent power of the Emperor was an important part of his constitutional position, especially in times of stress, and could be invoked during an Imperial Conference in the event of disagreement." (p. 48)

Maxon's account of the 1930's and 1940's indicates, although to this reader he does not make the point systematically enough, that no satisfactory institutional structure was successfully devised up to the end of World War II. The efforts to construct a coordinating body continued throughout the war, resulting in a succession of supreme councils, each abandoned when it turned out ineffective and replaced by another, no more effective than the last, until the trauma of defeat brought an end both to the problem and to its attempted solutions. It is in a way unfortunate that Maxon is not so singleminded a methodologist as to insist on carrying the

institutional analysis through the 1930's and 1940's without modifying its terms. His account of events in this later period tends to become more and more personalized and to present the political process in terms of clashes of individual ambitions rather than of group interests. While this trend in Maxon's analysis may accurately reflect what was happening to the Japanese political system at the time, this shift of his analytical emphasis is not explicitly justified.

Another major dimension of Maxon's analysis is his examination of motives. Of special interest are two factors he finds recurrently operative. These are the military man's code of action and the concept of responsibility. Of equal importance is his use of the concept of gekokujo, roughly the exercise of decision-making power by the lower echelons, sometimes specifically identified as the field grade Army officer group. A working interim translational equivalent would be "government from below."

While these three factors are clearly relevant to what happened, there are, it seems to me, some problems of analysis in respect to each of them which deserve further consideration. The Japanese military identified themselves with the "true national interests" and succeeded in imposing their definition of these interests. Their code apparently derived in part from an idealization of the interests of any professional

military group in a modern society, in part from survivals of a pre-modern military ethic. The latter, in the modern context, at some point became transformed from a code into a mystique, though it did not thereby lose immediate political significance. But this raises the difficult question of how one can determine at what point a set of principles of behavior gets so far out of phase with a social system that one is justified in using terms like fanaticism to describe the frame of mind of its adherents. The Japanese social order, as is evident from postwar developments, was adapted to the operation of a constitutional system based on representative government and the type of ethic that accompanies such a system. In spite of its deep roots in tradition, and in spite of the degree of social and political influence exercised by its adherents, there is thus some basis for judging the Japanese military ethic to have been a phenomenon of social pathology at the time of its greatest apparent dominance. We may note, parenthetically, that many Europeans at that time held a different view, that the military ethic was a permanent component of Japanese ideology.

The concept of responsibility in the Japanese context has at least two aspects. Maxon finds the traditional Japanese definition of responsibility accountable for the failure of key people to act in accordance with the needs of maintaining constitutional government. Thus responsibility becomes irresponsibility. Clearly, there are here two

incompatible demands, the cultural imperatives and the requirements of effective socio-political functioning. A comparable obscurity surrounds the practice of gekokujo. From the public administrator's standpoint, it was clearly deplorable. What Maxon does not as clearly analyze is the cultural base, which in this instance appears to be an old concept of the duties and obligations of a superior to his subordinates, quite probably modelled on the father-son relationship. Again, the scope of gekokujo is not entirely clear, as indicated in a most interesting communication from a Japanese naval officer quoted by Maxon on pp. 104-105.

Before my country (I should say the Army) went crazy, it was a general rule or custom that the high-ranking officers would give the general idea or just an outline of any plan to the lower echelon; then the latter worked out the details and it was finally approved by the former, who, of course, made any necessary revisions. But what actually happened is this: owing to poor discipline and the tendency of high-ranking officers to leave everything to the younger [field-grade] officers, the plans thought up in the lower echelons were in many cases approved by the high authorities without any correction whatsoever. Finally this process became so common and ingrained that if anybody in the upper positions attempted to improve the contents of any plan emanating from the lower echelons, they [the younger field-grade officers] would become very angry. You may call this gekokujo, but actually it is only a small part. The real meaning is more along the line of unruly or violent behavior of young officers in all affairs. For instance, by the use of assassination and similar violence (not a part of gekokujo, but the method used to get what they wanted) these field-grade officers could cause their "choice" to be appointed in high political positions; for example War Minister.

Gekokujo is not particularly or specifically applied to the Army or armed forces, but also spread to other parts of the government [civil] until the whole works went crazy.

Even in terms of the Japanese tradition, gekokujo apparently became, through the confusion of personal ambition with cultural imperatives, a highly pathological manifestation.

Finally, and with overwhelming pragmatic justification, in view of the outcome, Maxon renders the judgment that serious deficiencies of individual political wisdom, to some extent also of character, contributed to the nightmarish results. The Emperor, for example, was safeguarded by his closest and most devoted guardians, from playing the role which, if he had been allowed to play it, could have moderated if not reversed the disastrous trends of two decades. And this in the name of protecting the system! Here again Maxon's standard of judgment is clear. Whatever contributed to the disintegration of a responsible constitutional system was bad. One can hardly disagree. But if one were to render a judgment in terms of the complexity of the problems which had to be faced from day to day or month to month, and of the conflicting values that demanded to be preserved, one could not always be so sure what course was the truly wise one. Here the verdict of history and the verdict of sociology are not necessarily identical, at least in the national context. The question of what international standards apply is another, and not negligible, matter.

Reischauer has the special knack, perhaps more than any other American scholar, of thinking in Japanese terms, of

seeing as characteristic or significant in any situation what a Japanese would see. His book is a general one, including a look back at earlier Japanese history, geography, and the Japanese character. Most of the rewritten and new material refers to the postwar period.

Several postwar socio-political developments are mentioned by Reischauer as particularly characteristic. There has been increased social mobility, in part a resumption of trends blocked for a decade or two by the prewar and wartime developments. An economic levelling process, both up and down, has taken place. Intellectual trends are marked by an upsurge of pacifism, radicalism, and internationalism. The outstanding political change, apart from the disappearance of the military as a potent political factor, has been the introduction of a functioning representative government. For some years, party organizations were unstable, but short-term shifts now seem to have given way to a two-party situation which, for the present and in all likelihood for the immediately foreseeable future, appears to be stable.

The part played by the Occupation in facilitating this transformation from the pathological politics of the 1940's to the apparently normal present system is assessed judiciously by Reischauer. If I were to add some personal judgments, one would be a guess that Reischauer does not sufficiently give weight to the thoroughly traumatized state of the Japanese

public during the first two postwar years. I believe he had little or no opportunity for firsthand contact with Japan in that period. The Occupation perhaps performed psychological functions that Reischauer does not mention. It had, among other things, the great virtue of providing the Japanese with a surcease from concern about responsibility, with consequent diminution of hostility in internal group relations. If in the latter years of the Occupation disappointed radicals were an influential group, the fact that their feelings found partial release in anti-Americanism had at least the virtue of keeping the level of internal hostility relatively low.

If a kind of cultural lag, the discrepancy between an ethic which contains cultural survivals and the functional demands of a modern political system, was as important a cause of conflict in the prewar situation as our earlier discussion indicated, it is still quite possible that problems of a similar order may arise in Japan in the future. This time, however, the discrepancy may well be less glaring, the contestants may share more common ground, and the contest itself may be refereed by an interested, participating public audience.

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